

J
Joe Bustillos
5/13/77
RS 110 B

LUKE & THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Jesus answered him, "Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the reign of God." - Luke 9.62

Over three years ago was the first time that I purposefully decided to read through the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation. At a time in my life when a lot of my friends were beginning to look into the "religious scene," I figured that reading the book of the New Covenant could not do too much harm to me. As I stumbled my way through Matthew's gospel I began to have a little difficulty figuring out what a "gentile" or a "pharisee" was. I did not even know if it was bad to be called by those terms. Well, my unanswered questions did not disappear when I began reading the gospel according to Mark. What is more is that I could not understand why this gospel just repeated what the last one had already written. This process was repeated two more times before I finished the "historical" section of the New Testament. This was my first experience with the Synoptic Problem.

Several months after giving up my endeavor to read the whole New Testament I gave my life to Jesus. Again I began my journey through the pages of the New Testament. Only this time, the scriptures took on a new meaning, it was as if I had never read them before (the first time I got as far as first thessalonians). The fact that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John appeared to repeat themselves I simply accepted. My desire was to absorb into my new life the words of scripture without getting tripped up (*skandalizo*) by what appeared to be trivial.

After about a year however the problems of "contradictions" and chronology began to reappear. I did not understand why, for example,

in Matthew and Luke Jesus cleansed the temple immediately following his triumphant entry, whereas in the gospel of Mark it was not until the day after, and in John there is no triumphant entry recorded at all, but his cleansing of the temple was put at the beginning of his public ministry. And, why in the story of the demons in Gerasa (Mt. 8.28-34;Mk.5.2-20) does Matthew say that there were two demoniacs while Mark only mentions one? Or why is Luke's genealogy of Jesus so different from Matthew's? The explanation of these problems that I received from many of my Protestant friends did not satisfy me. It was not until the beginning of this year that I began to see that the scriptures were not meant to be read a "play-by-play" account. I did not realize that the evangelists, in writing the gospels, took various historical events in Jesus' life and "molded" them to emphasize a specific teaching.

Luke's gospel, for example (it is about time that I started writing about this gospel) seems to draw one's attention to the need of personal faith in the gospel of Christ. Matthew on the other hand makes a general call to the nation of Israel as a whole to return to its Messiah. A classical example of this is the story of the Centurion's servant (Mt.8.5-13;Lk. 7.1-10). Matthew's account of the story ends with Jesus saying:"Many will come from the east and the west and will find a place at the banquet in the kingdom of God... while the natural heirs of the kingdom will be driven out into darkness"(Mt.8.11b,12b). Matthew rebukes the nation for its lack of faith by saying that the gentiles will enter the kingdom that they foolishly rejected. Now when Luke records the story he does not add the verses about Israel failing to enter the kingdom. Luke emphasized the concept that by his faith the centurion saved his servant's life. Later in his gospel

Luke does mention the "many coming from east and west into the kingdom," but again, he emphasized the need for personal faith in the Christ.

When I compared the gospel so Mark and Luke I noted a distinct similarity. Both Mark and Luke seem to convey the message that now is the time for repentance. Mark shares this message by portraying Jesus as being in a hurry to preach the coming of the Kingdom. Rashing from village to village, spreading the good new of God's salvation, the prophet from Galilee tirelessly proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." While Luke's Jesus is not in that much of a hurry, his discourses waste no time in presenting what the Messiah demands from his followers:

At that time, some were present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. He said in reply: "Do you think that these Galileans were the greatest sinners in Galilee just because they suffered this? By no mean! But I tell you, you will all come to the same end unless you repent. Or take those eighteen who were killed by a falling tower in Siloam. Do you think they were more guilty than anyone else who lived in Jerusalem? Certainly not! But I tell you, you will all come to the same end unless you repent."

Luke 13.1-5

Does Jesus really mean that? Does he really mean to threaten us? Hey, not only does Luke's Jesus say what is quoted above, but he also repeats those "ridiculous" commandment found in Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount: "When someone slaps you on one cheek, turn and give him the other; when someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well!"(Luke 6.29).

Does Jesus actually expect us to allow others to abuse us? And if we are not to take these commandments literally, then what do they mean? Before we start a mud-slinging fight on whether the "hard"

teachings found in Luke should be taken literally or if we should rationalize them away, let us consider the possibility that Luke is just trying to show us, in a very real manner, that faith in Christ calls for a radical departure from what often comes natural. Our lives in Christ are to be lived as though we were new creatures. Echoing the words of St. Paul, the Jesus of Luke lays out very plainly in a compassionate way how we are to live our new lives.

... You must lay aside your former way of life and the old self which deteriorates through illusion and desire and acquire a fresh spiritual way of thinking. You must put on the new man created in God's image, whose justice and holiness are born of truth.

- St. Paul
(Ephesians 4.22b-23)

C. F. Bellant, Jr.